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BLACK MASS



Johnny Depp is back and better than ever. After a few not-so-great roles, Depp brings menace and vivid psychopathology to the role of Whitey Bulger; a real gangster whose story is compelling enough to recommend, especially with Depp in the role. There is nothing new or original in the telling of this familiar tale of double-cross and deception as two people on different sides of the law coin are pitted against one another.

In the end, no one wins and the good guys aren't all that good. The stigma of being a snitch, a rat, an informant is explored here from different perspectives. In the end, people will do whatever it takes to save them from prosecution.

Benedict Cumberbatch gives great support as Bulger's brother Billy, whose political career is destroyed by his brother's underworld dealings. Joel Edgerton as John Connelly, an FBI agent who has serious boundary issues and reminds us that in the world of cops and criminals, you have to be very sure about whose side you are on. What makes *Black Mass* worth watching are the performances of a group of very talented actors who bring authenticity to their portrayals of people caught in a web of government and mafia intrigue.

I am always interested in how similar these seemingly opposing forces are. Both have codes of conduct, rules and consequences for breaking them. Death is the usual penalty. Both the good guys and bad guys will stop at nothing to get what or who they want – no matter who gets hurt in the process. No judgment, just an observation.

Crime dramas remind us that there are people in the world who do not have the same regard for human life as we do. They remove us one step from the reality of this on the evening news. In some ways, I think they desensitize us to just how bad people can be. *Black Mass* shows the consequences of breaking the law and the conflict between those who commit crimes and their friends and family who love them. Sometimes they make criminal life seem cool and glamorous but *Black Mass* doesn't take that stance. It tells the story without embellishment.

It feels formulaic, but then good vs. bad is the original plotline, isn't it? If you prefer a more fact-based documentary version that includes interviews with the real players, you can find it in *Whitey: The United States vs. James Bulger*. It is streaming now on the popular internet sites. I recommend it if you are interested in the rest of the story. If you enjoy the big screen, larger-than-life portraits, and especially if you are a Depp fan, check it out.



I give *Black Mass*, four golden tickets.

